

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 MOSCOW 00119 01 OF 02 041128Z

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ACTION SS-25

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5891

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MOSCOW 0119

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR UR EG SY IZ

SUBJECT: SOVIET OFFICIAL ON POSTPONEMENT OF BREZHNEV'S VISIT
AND ME SITUATION

REF: MOSCOW 18213

1. SUMMARY. I CALLED ON M.D. SYTENKO, CHIEF OF THE MFA'S NEAR EAST COUNTRIES DIVISION, JANUARY 3 TO ASK ABOUT EH POSTPONEMENT OF BREZHNEV'S ME TRIP AND TO GET HIS VIEWS ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST. SYTENKO COULD ADD LITTLE TO WHAT HAS APPEARED IN THE SOVIET PRESS REGARDING THE CANCELLATION OF THE BREZHNEV TRIP, BUT HE LARGELY DISCOUNTED THE THEORY THAT BREZHNEV'S HEALTH WAS A FACTOR. HE WOULD NOT SPECULATE ABOUT WHEN THE VISIT MIGHT BE RESCHEDULED. NOT UNEXPECTEDLY, SYTENKO PUT THE SOVIET-EGYPTIAN TALKS IN THE MOST POSITIVE LIGHT HE COULD. HE FOCUSED ON THE PUBLICLY STATED SOVIET COINCIDENCE OF VIEWS SUPPORTING THE EARLIEST POSSIBLE RESUMPTION OF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE AND JOINT SUPPORT FOR THE PARTICIPATION OF THE PLO IN THE MEPC. HE HINTED THAT THE EGYPTIANS HAD MADE REQUESTS FOR MODER WEAPONRY, BUT GAVE NO DETAILS. SYTENKO STRONGLY RESTATED HIS VIEW THAT THE GENEVA CONRERENCE SHOULD BE REOPENED (REFTEL), BUT HE EXPRESSED SKEPTICISM THAT THE U.S. WAS COMMITTED TO RECONVENING THE MEPC QUICKLY.

HE REITERATED SOVIET SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL'S EXISTENCE

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 MOSCOW 00119 01 OF 02 041128Z

WITHIN ITS 1967 BORDERS. HE SAID THE SOVIETS BELIEVE THE

PLO WOULD AGREE TO ATTEND THE MEPC IF THEY RECEIVED AN INVITATION WHICH DID NOT REFER SPECIFICALLY TO SC RESOLUTION 242, BUT USED A MORE GENERAL FORMULA REFERRING TO "UN RESOLUTIONS." SYTENKO HAD NOTHING NEW ABOUT HOW THE PLO MIGHT ATTEND THE CONFERENCE, AND, CONSISTENT WITH HIS EARLIER VIEWS (REFTEL), WAS VAGUE ABOUT THE TIMING OF PLO PARTICIPATION. ON THE ME SITUATION GENERALLY, SYTENKO SAID MOSCOW IS CONVINCED THAT EGYPT AND SYRIA WILL NOT START A NEW WAR, BUT THEY ARE CONCERNED THAT ISRAEL MIGHT. HE CRITICIZED ISRAEL'S RIGIDITY AND TEL AVIV'S CONTINUED INSISTENCE THAT "SMALL PIECES OF TERRITORY" CAN PROVIDE A GUARANTEE OF ISRAEL'S SECURITY. HE CONCLUDED THE CONVERSATION WITH A SECOND STRONG PITCH FOR RENEWAL OF THE MEPC AND CRITICAL COMMENT ON THE STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH TOWARD A SETTLEMENT WHICH HE THOUGHT WAS DANGEROUS BECAUSE IT PRODUCED SUSPICION AMONG THE CONFRONTATION STATES. END SUMMARY.

2. SYTENKO, WHO WAS EVIDENTLY UNDER CLOSE WRPAS, SAID HE COULD NOT TELL ME VERY MUCH ABOUT THE CANCELLATION OF BREZHNEV'S VISIT. HE NOTED THAT THERE ARE OCCASIONS WHEN STATE VISITS ARE POSTPONED, AND THE ACTION IN THIS INSTANCE SHOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED SO UNUSUAL. THERE WERE, OF COURSE, THREE VISITS INVOLVED, AND ALL THE STATES HAD AGREED TO POSTPONE THE VISIT FOR NOW. WHEN I ASKED WHETHER THE POSTPONEMENT HAD RESULTED ONLY FROM SOVIET-EGYPTIAN CONSIDERATIONS OR WHETHER OTHER MATTERS RELATING TO THE POSITIONS OF SYRIA AND IRAQ HAD ENTERED INTO THE DECISION, SYTENKO DID NOT ANSWER DIRECTLY BUT REPEATED THAT ALL THREE STATES INVOLVED HAD CONCURRED IN THE POSTPONEMENT. ASKED WHETHER ANY TIME FRAME EXISTED FOR RESCHEDULING THE BREZHNEV TOUR, HE SAID HE THOUGHT TIMING HAD NOT BEEN DISCUSSED DURING THE TALKS WITH THE EGYPTIANS, AND HE COULD NOT PREDICT WHEN THE VISIT MIGHT BE RESCHEDULED.

3. SYTENKO SHOWED SOME SENSITIVITY AND ANNOYANCE AT WESTERN PRESS SPECULATION ABOUT THE REASONS FOR THE CANCELLATION OF THE TOUR. HE SAID HE DID NOT SEE WHY THE PRESS WAS SPREADING SO MANY STORIES AND REPEAED CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 MOSCOW 00119 01 OF 02 041128Z

THAT THERE WAS NOTHING "UNUSUAL" IF COUNTRIES DECIDED TO POSTPONE A STATE VISIT. WHEN I NOTED THAT A NUMBER OF PRESS STORIES HAD GIVEN BREZHNEV'S HEALTH AS THE REASON THE VISIT WAS CANCELLED, SYTENKO AVOIDED A DIRECT DENIAL THAT HEALTH WAS INVOLVED. BUT HE POINTEDLY NOTED THAT BREZHNEV HAD RECEIVED THE EGYPTIAN MINISTERS, BY IMPLICATION DISCOUNTING THE HEALTH STORY.

4. ASKED ABOUT OTHER ASPECTS OF FAHMY'S VISIT, SYTENKO MADE AN EFFORT TO PUT THE BEST FACE ON THE SOVIET-EGYPTIAN TALKS. HE REFERRED TO FAHMY'S POSITIVE STATEMENT ABOUT HIS MEETINGS HERE AND SAID THE SOVIETS ALSO TAKE A POSITIVE VIEW OF THE EGYPTIAN VISIT. HE THOUGHT THE TALKS HAD LAID A BASIS ON WHICH SOVIET-EGYPTIAN RELATIONS CAN DEVELOP "UNTIL EGYPT AND THE USSR AGREE ON A NEW TIME FOR A VISIT." THE SOVIETS AND EGYPTIANS HAD AGREED ON THE JOINT STATEMENT ABOUT THE GENVA CONFERENCE. HE SAID U.S. REPRESENTATIVES HAD TOLD THE SOVIETS EGYPT WAS NOT READY FOR RENEWAL OF THE MPEC. NONETHELESS, THE SOVIETS AND EGYPTIANS IN OCTOBER AND NOW IN DECEMBER AGREED THAT THE MPEC SHOULD RECONVENE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. SYTENKO ALSO EMPHASIZED SOVIET-EGYPTIAN AGREEMENT ON THE PALESTINIANS, CITING THE JOINT STATEMENT'S REFERENCE TO THE PARTICIPATION OF "ALL INTERESTED PARTIES," INCUDING THE PLO AS THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PALESTINIANS.

5. ON BILATERAL RELATIONS SYTENKO SAID THE SOVIETS CONFIRMED THAT THE USSR WOULD DEVELOP RELATIONS WITH EGYPT IN ALL FIELDS ON THE BASIS OF THE TREATY OF 1971. THE EGYPTIANS, IN TURN, RECIPROCATED THIS POSITION AND THANKED THE SOVIETS FOR THE HELP MOSCOW HAS GIVEN EGYPT AND THE OTHER ARABS. ECONOMIC AID HAD BEEN DISCUSSEDM THE EGYPTIANS HAD ASKED FOR EXPANSION OF SOME PROJECTS AND SOME NEW ONES. SYTENKO SAID THE ECONOMIC RELATIONS WOULD PROCEED NORMALLY. WHEN ASKED, HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THERE HAD BEEN "NORMAL" TALKS ABOUT MILITARY SUPPLIES AND COOPERATION, BUT HE GAVE NO DETAILS. HOWEVER, HE HINTED THAT THE EGYPTIANS HAD MADE REQUESTS FOR NEW SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS BY SAYING THAT HE KEEPS READING THAT THE U.S. IS PROVIDING ISRAEL WITH "MORE AND MORE AND MORE , EVEN FROM MILITARY

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 MOSCOW 00119 01 OF 02 041128Z

STOCKPILES." HE SAID: "THE ARABS SEE THIS AND ASK US FOR WEAPONS."

6. I ASKED SYTENKO ABOUT HIS VIEWS ON THE GENEVA CONFERENCE, NOTING THAT THERE STILL APPEARS TO BE CONCERN THAT TO REOPEN THE TALKS WITHOUT SOME UNDERSTANDING ABOUT PROCEDURES AND RESULTS MIGHT PRODUCE A STALEMATE. SYTENKO SAID, ON THE CONTRARY, THAT IF THE U.S. AND USSR AGREED FIRST ABOUT CONVENING THE MPEC THE PROBLEMS COULD BE SOLVED. HE EXPRESSED SKEPTICISM ABOU THE SECRETARY'S PRIVATE REMARK IN NEW YORK LAST FALL WHICH HAD INDICATED THAT THE CONFERENCE MIGHT RECONVENE IN JANUARY. HE SAID HE DID NOT THINK THE U.S. WAS KEEPING TO THIS.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 MOSCOW 00119 02 OF 02 041145Z

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ACTION SS-25

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 MOSCOW 0119

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7. ON SPECIFIC PROBLEMS, HE SAID HE THOUGHT ALL NOW UNDERSTOOD THA ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL TO THE 1967 BOUNDRIES IS ESSNETIAL. WHEN I ASKED IF THE 1967 BOUNDARIES WERE STILL THOS SUPPORTED BY THE USSR, SYTENKO SAID THIS IS THE SOVIET POSITION AND IT IS THE POSITION OF EGYPT AND SYRIA. SYTENKO ALSO REITERATED SOVIET SUPPORT FOR THE EXISTENCE OF ISRAEL.

8. ASKED ABOUT THE PROBLEM OF PLO PARTICIPATION AND THEIR ACCEPTANCE OF THE 1967 FRONTIERS, SYTENKO SAID THE PLO IS DIFFERENT. MOSCOW HAS THE IMPRESSION THAT THE PLO WILL AGREE TO GO TO GENEVA. THE MODERATES IN THE PALESTINIAN MOVEMENT WILL SUPPORT PARTICIPATION. HOWEVER, THEY FIRST NEED AN INVITATION SIMILAR TO THE INVITATIONS WHICH WERE ISSUED TO THE OTHER PARTICIPANTS BY WALDHEIM. ALSO, AN INVITATION TO THE PLO CANNOT BE ON THE BASIS OF SC RESOLUTION 242. SYTENKO SUGGESTED THAT A VAGUER FORMULATION IGH BE ACCEPTABLE WHICH REFERRED ONLY TO "UN RESOLUTIONS." SYTENKO SAID SUCH AN INVITATION MIGHT NOT BE NECESSARY FOR THE MODERATES, BUT WOULD BE ESSENTIAL TO THE RADICALS LIKE HABASH WHO TAKES THE POSITION THAT PARTICIPATION IN THE MEPC AMOUNTS T OTREASON.

9. SYTENKO HAD NOTHING NEW ON HOW THE PALESTINIANS MIGHT GO TO GENEVA. HE RESTAED HIS EARLIER VIEW (REFTEL) THAT THIS WOULD BE DISCUSSED AT THE QUADRIPARTITE MEETING IN CAIRO. HE EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT THE MEETING WOULD

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 MOSCOW 00119 02 OF 02 041145Z

RESOLVE THIS QUESTION. HOWEVER, HE CONCLUDED IT WAS CLEAR THAT IT IS NOT POSSIBLE ANY LONGER TO HAVE THE GENEVA CONFERENCE REOPEN WITHOUT PLO PARTICIPIATION. AS TO THE TIMING OF THEIR PARTICIPATION, THIS COULD BE DECIDED ONCE A FIRM DECISION HAD BEEN TAKEN TO RECONVENE GENVA.

10. I ASKED WHETHER THERE WERE ANY DEVELOPMENTS REGARDING THE PLO'S MOSCOW OFFICE, SYTENKO SAID THAT THE PLO HAD NOT YET NAMED ANYONE TO STAFF IT, AND THE SOVIETS HAD RECEIVED NO INFORMATION ABOUT WHEN IT WOULD OPEN. HOWEVER, THE SOVIETS HAVE MADE IT CLEAR THAT ALL THE PLO HAS TO DO IS NAME SOME PEOPLE TO THE OFFICE AND MOSCOW IS READY TO OPEN IT.

11. I ASKED SYTENKO'S IMPRESSION ABOUT THE GENERAL SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST. HE SAID THE SOVIETS ARE CONVINCED THAT EGYPT AND SYRIA WILL NOT START A WAR. HOWEVER, THE USSR IS AFRAID ISRAEL MIGHT. TEL AVIV CONTINUES TO TALK ABOUT A "PREVENTIVE STRIKE" AND ABOUT DESTROYING THE SYRIAN ARMY. SYTENKO EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT ISRAEL MIGHT NOT OPENLY ACKNOWLEDGE STARTING HOSTILITIES, BUT MIGHT DEVELOP SOME PRETEXT FOR TAKING ACTION (HE REFERRED, IN THIS CONTEXT, TO THE GERMAN-POLISH BORDER INCIDENT WHICH HITLER USED TO JUSTIFY THE INVASION OF POLAND). I REPLIED THAT AS SYTENKO KNEW THE U.S. BELIEVED RESTRAINT ON ALL SIDES WAS ESSENTIAL AND NOTED THAT THE SECRETARY HAD RECENTLY SAID THAT THERE SEEMED TO BE TOO MUCH LOOSE TALK ABOUT WAR IN THE AREA.

12. SYTENKO CONCLUDED WITH A THIRD STRONG PITCH TO RENEW THE GENEVA CONFERENCE AND SOME CRITICAL COMMENT ABOUT THE STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH. HE SAID THE PROBLEMS OF THE ME HAVE TO BE LOOKED AFTER. HE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND ISRAEL'S RIGIDITY. HE REITERATED HIS EARLIER STATED VIEW THAT ISRAEL SHOULD GIVE UP THE IDEA THAT IT CAN PROVIDE FOR ITS OWN SECURITY OR CAN INSURE ITS SECURITY BY "GRABBING" SMALL PIECES OF TERRITORY THROUGH THE PROCESS OF "MINOR RECTIFICATIONS." HE SAID ONLY INTERNATIONAL GUARANTEES CAN PROVIDE THE SECURITY

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 MOSCOW 00119 02 OF 02 041145Z

ISRAEL WANTS, AND THESE GUARANTEES CAN BE DISCUSSED AT GENEVA. HE REITERATED THAT THE USSR IS PREPARED TO

PARTICIPATE IN GUARANTEES. THE IMPORTANT THING IS TO GET PEOPLE TO THE NEGOTIATING TABLE. THEN EVERYONE WOULD KNOW THAT THE PARTIES ARE TALKING ABOUT A SETTLEMENT AND NOT PREPARING FOR WAR. IN THIS CONTEXT, HE SAID, THE SOVIETS HAVE NO ILLUSIONS ABOUT THE DIFFICULTIES OF ACHIEVING A SETTLEMENT. HOWEVER, REFERRING TO RUMORS ABOUT A POSSIBLE SECOND DISENGAGEMENT IN SINAI, HE SAID THAT IF SEPARATE DEALS ARE MADE, IT WILL BE MORE DIFFICULT BECAUSE OTHERS WILL BE SUSPICIOUS. A DISENGAGEMENT COULD TAKE PLACE DURING TALKS AT GENEVA, UNDER THE UMBRELLA OF A MEPC, BUT IT WOULD BE BETTER TO HAVE THE CONFERENCE DISCUSS AND FORMULATE THE DOCUMENTS, POSSIBLY IN A STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH.

13. DEPARTMENT MAY WISH TO PASS THIS MESSAGE TO
INTERESTED ME POSTS.

STOESSEL

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Message Attributes

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